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WE HEAD FOR THE HORIZON AND RETURN WITH BLOODSHOT EYES (BRIEF COMMENTS ON THE PLANE OF IMMANENCE)

PHILOFICTION DELEUZE, DELEUZE/GUATTARI, NON-PHILOSOPHY, PLANE OF IMMANENCE

The question of the status of the plane of immanence has often been interpreted in a positive light. Namely, it is evident to the reader that 'reaching the plane of immanence' is portrayed as a virtue of the philosopher insofar as philosophy, understood as the creation of concepts, necessarily relies upon the plane on which philosophy's concepts are brought into relation. As if to corroborate this interpretation, Deleuze and Guattari themselves write

Spinoza is the Christ of philosophers, and the greatest philosophers are hardly more than apostles who distance themselves from or draw near to this mystery. Spinoza, the infinite becoming-philosopher: he showed, drew up, and thought the "best" plane of *immanence*—that is, the purest, the one that does not hand itself over to the transcendent or restore any transcendent, the one that inspires the fewest illusions, bad feelings, and erroneous perceptions" (*What is Philosophy?* 60).

Thus the virtue of a thought adequate to its plane of immanence appears as self-evident, as something axiomatic; the inherent virtue of the plane of immanence seems to function as an analytic truth that is simply reiterated across the work of Deleuze, and his joint works with Guattari.

However, and against this view of the plane of immanence as both epistemic and ethico-political virtue, it is important to remind ourselves that while constructing the plane of immanence is a necessary condition for the creation of concepts (as philosophy's presupposed non-conceptual, or pre-philosophical, correlate), this task carried out by thought cannot be the site of both **epistemic** virtue and **ethico-political** praxis. Why? For the very reason that, for Deleuze and Guattari, the importance of constructing a plane of immanence is not justified in terms of the ethical or political potential opened up by immanence as such. Rather, we must construct a plane of immanence since it is only in relation to the plane of immanence that concepts themselves take on significance and value for the thinker: "All concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning and which can themselves only be isolated or understood as their solution emerges" (WP, 16).

The plane of immanence orients Thought in a way that allows the thinker to distinguish between true and false problems and

thereby allows the thinker to formulate true as opposed to false problems. Unlike the portrait of Spinoza as the apex of the philosopher *par excellence*, Deleuze and Guattari's contention is that while we all must strive toward the plane's construction in our own thought, the plane of immanence itself appears as something wholly devoid of virtue and is not a model to guide collective praxis but a necessary condition for the creation of concepts. It is for this reason that Deleuze and Guattari do not hesitate to praise Spinoza's fidelity to immanence while simultaneously laboring against the plane of immanence established by capitalism despite its necessary construction by someone such as Marx. Capital, as our specifically contemporary plane of immanence takes up certain tendencies from previous social forms in order to effect a world wide expansion. It is for this reason that we require a new construction of a place of immanence, since it is Capital that serves as the historical condition and futural horizon that determines the totality of planetary social life:

"A world market extends to the ends of the earth before passing into the galaxy: even the skies become horizontal. This is not a result of the Greek endeavor but a resumption, in another form and with other means, on a scale hitherto unknown, which nonetheless relaunches the combination for which the Greeks took the initiative—democratic imperialism, colonizing democracy. The European can, therefore, regard himself, as the Greek did, as not one psychosocial type among others but Man *par excellence*, and with much more expansive force and missionary zeal than the Greek" (WP, 97).

If the plane of immanence was simply the fusion of an epistemic requirement and political goal, there would be no way to understand their following assertion: "Concepts and plane are strictly correlative, but nevertheless the two should not be confused. The plane of immanence is neither a concept nor the concept of all concepts" (WP, 35-6). The plane is the nexus of problems that give significance and meaning to the concepts that come to populate it. In other words, and as Deleuze already noted as early as *Difference and Repetition*, the plane of immanence is the dialectic between Idea-Problems, on the one hand, and their possible solutions as incarnated by concepts, on the other. Once we understand that Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the need to discriminate the plane of immanence from its concepts, that we can no longer satisfy ourselves with the conflation between immanence and concept, problems and their solutions, the task of the philosopher and the task of politics:

"The famous phrase of the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 'mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve', does not mean that the problems are only apparent or that they are already solved, but, on the contrary, that the economic conditions of a problem determine or give rise to the manner in which it finds a solution within the framework of the real relations of the society. Not that the observer can draw the least optimism from this, for these 'solutions' may involve stupidity or cruelty, the horror of war or 'the solution of the Jewish problem'. More precisely, the solution is always that which a society deserves or gives rise to as a consequence of the manner in which, given its real relations, it is able to pose the problems set within it and to it by the differential relations it incarnates" (DR, 186).

Thus, against the idea that a philosopher's innocence or moral virtue is proportionate to the adequacy of their concepts and their construction of a plane of immanence, Deleuze and Guattari write,

"The plane of immanence is not a concept that is or can be thought but rather the *image of thought*, the image thought gives itself of what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find one's bearings in thought...The image of thought implies a strict division between fact and *right*: what pertains to thought as such must be distinguished from contingent features of the brain or historical opinions...The image of thought retains only what thought can claim by right" (WP, 37).

The task, then, is to construct the image of thought adequate to our historical present since it is the plane itself that determines what Thought (and philosophy) can rightfully call it's own, or properly understand its broader socio-political function in the present. However, if the plane of immanence *is* the Image of Thought, it is clear that a plane is only constructed in order to be overcome. It is for this reason that while Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the necessity of the plane of immanence, they ultimately assert that it is in light of the concepts philosophy can create (or the percepts and affects of art, or the functions of science) that we can overturn the image of thought itself. As Deleuze already understood, the "... 'solvability' [of a Problem] must depend upon an internal characteristic: it must be determined by the conditions of the problem, engendered in and by the problem along with the real solutions" (DR, 162).

Planes of immanence may be necessary, and we can acknowledge someone like Spinoza's fidelity in his thoroughgoing construction as seen in his *Ethics*, while also acknowledging that it is only in the solutions within the plane that a philosophical/political praxis can emerge; whereby the emergence of a solution spells the overcoming of the plane/image of thought itself. In this way we should hear Marx in background of Deleuze; as Marx himself already understood "communism is not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself...but the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence" (German Ideology). Our fidelity to the construction a plane of immanence (taken as *epistemic virtue*), only gains in *political utility* insofar as the plane is constructed to its logical conclusion and the concepts created by the thinker within this plane is a solution that abolishes the present state of things...whose conditions (i.e. nexus of problems, plane of immanence established by capital) are already now in existence.

For what else did Deleuze mean when he praised the free reign of simulacra as the crowned anarchy at the end of his overturning of Platonism? The idea that the solutions to a problem; the instantiations of an Idea; neither resemble nor share in the essence of the problem-Idea to which they are indexed? Any position to the contrary and which posits solutions as sharing in the essence and remaining fundamentally identical to an Idea-problem, implicitly or explicitly commits one to a fatalism in the face of capital's plane of immanence: ***There is no longer any available alternative solution to the problem posed by capital's plane of immanence (neoliberalism). There is no longer such a thing as society (Thatcher). We have reached the end of history (Fukuyama), and the cause célèbre is this best of all possible worlds with the correct and justifiable amount of global suffering (Habermas).***

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